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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000254

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDEE ADDED, SUBJECT LINE)

SIPDIS

FOR IO/PSC (HEATHER VON BEHREN) AND AF/C (CHRISTOPHER  
LAMORA)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2019

TAGS: PREL, PHUM, KPKO, UNSC, IN, CG  
SUBJECT: DRC, INDIA LOCKED IN A HIGH-STAKES BATTLE OVER  
THE FUTURE OF MONUC AND THE DRC

REF: A. KINSHASA 195 (NOTAL)  
B. STATE 18863 (NOTAL) AND RESPONSES FROM SEVERAL  
POSTS

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Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador William J. Garvelink for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) India's decision to withdraw its contingent from MONUC (reftels) has exposed a bitter row between the country that hosts the UN's largest peace-keeping operation and the country that is MONUC's largest troop contributor. A close look at the DRC-India feud reveals a complex mosaic of real or perceived slights, as well as a number of underlying tensions and hidden agendas fueling resentment and anger on both sides. We suspect that Congolese hardliners welcome India's decision to leave because it weakens MONUC and hastens the day when MONUC leaves for good. We are not certain, however, that President Kabila supports the hardliners. We also believe that the reasons India has given publicly for its intention to withdraw from MONUC -- that the DRC does not appreciate its important contributions to MONUC -- are perhaps not the real basis for its decision to withdraw. End summary.

Indian colonel praises Nkunda  
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2. (C) Tensions between Congolese officials and MONUC's Indian contingent came to a head last year when the Indian officer responsible for liaising with the CNDP (the leading rebel force in North Kivu led by dissident Tutsi general Laurent Nkunda) was feted by Nkunda on the eve of his redeployment. Clearly elated over his return home (a state of mind undoubtedly made more intense by the many drinks he imbibed at the event), the colonel lauded Nkunda in his good-bye statement as a worthy opponent. Unfortunately for him, a CNDP defector recorded the statement and gave it to the Congolese army. Although there is little evidence that the colonel gave the CNDP any actionable intelligence, the incident did give ammunition to Congolese hard-liners who had accused the Indians of being CNDP sympathizers and informants and thus responsible for the FARDC's many humiliating losses to Nkunda's forces. The Indians tried to make amends by

reassuring the GDRC that the officer would be disciplined for poor judgment. But the damage was done. (Note: The commanding general of the Indian contingent told us that in addition to facing a disciplinary board the hapless colonel would not be allowed to take up his assignment as a senior officer on the Kashmir front. End note.)

3. (C) This incident was but the latest in a series of events contributing to poor relations between the Congolese and Indians assigned to MONUC. A small number of Indian troops was implicated in 1997 in sexual abuse cases involving MONUC troops in the eastern Congo. Indian soldiers have also been accused of selling arms to rebel groups in return for gold and other precious minerals. A senior MONUC official confirmed these allegations but also noted that the Indians were far from being MONUC's worst offenders. He also emphasized that India was among MONUC's most serious troop contributors in terms of disciplining its soldiers.

4. (C) In short, MONUC in general and the Indians specifically have become a convenient and compelling scapegoat for the Congolese to avoid blame for the GDRC's own incompetent handling of the situation in the east. A frequent accusation against the Indians is that they have done little to prevent violence by militias against innocent civilians in the war-torn eastern region. MONUC's mandate to protect civilians is clear but it is not authorized to initiate offensive actions against rebel forces but rather to support the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDCO). The FARDC, one

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of the world's most dysfunctional militaries, have rarely attacked rebel groups, having been quickly routed by the CNDP in particular whenever there is a fight. The FARDC, however, are known for shamefully attacking innocent civilians. An upsurge in anti-Indian sentiment, orchestrated by the former ministers of defense and the interior, with support from local politicians, was clearly in evidence in early October of last year when the FARDC was routed by the CNDP. At that time government leaders, both national and provincial, paid crowds to throw stones at MONUC vehicles and otherwise harass Indian peacekeepers.

Congolese-India tensions run deep  
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5. (C) Although recent events have exacerbated the situation, friction between Congolese and Indians is not a

recent phenomenon. There is a widespread distrust of Muslims (most Indians in the Congo historically have been Muslims) among the native peoples of the Great Lakes region of east Africa dating from the 12th century when Arab slave traders penetrated westward from Indian Ocean ports. The Swahili language, spoken extensively in the eastern Congo, is a legacy of the Muslim Arab presence. Later, large numbers of Indian traders immigrated to the British colony of Uganda; many left Uganda for opportunities in the neighboring colony of the Belgian Congo. As in Uganda, most Indians left the Congo as a result of the civil conflicts of the 1990's. But they are still remembered by many locals as foreign exploiters. Finally, many Congolese resent the relative affluence most Indians living in their country.

Some Congolese want MONUC to leave  
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6. (C) In more recent times Indians have also provoked resentment among some Congolese outside the eastern region, where fewer Indians have settled. Indians living and working in the Congo are known for their resistance to learning French and their use of English at meetings and in other settings. Most Indian merchants in Kinshasa send their children to English-language schools. Although the francophone vs. anglophone debate is not as intense in the DRC (as a former colony of Belgium, not France, the DRC is less subject to French pressure on the language issue than are former French colonies), we have heard from multiple sources that the Indians' insistence on using English irritates some of the Congolese elite, particularly politicians and senior military officers in Kinshasa.

7. (C) Another factor contributing to the current crisis is a lack of understanding and sensitivity by senior Congolese regarding the importance of India's continued presence in MONUC. Some Congolese politicians seem to believe that if the Indians leave, the UN will easily find other countries to send replacements. But more troubling is the agenda of many senior Congolese officials who do understand what is at stake and want MONUC to leave. Some are motivated by nationalism (they see MONUC's presence as a violation of DRC sovereignty), but many have a more sinister goal. Without MONUC hardliners would have a freer hand to crack down on critics and, ultimately, to suspend democratic institutions. Getting the Indians to leave would be a major victory against MONUC for the anti-democracy hardliners. We believe former Defense Minister Chikez and influential presidential advisor Augustin Katumba are in this category. President Kabila, however, perhaps does not agree with this group.

The Indians have their own agenda  
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8. (C) We believe the Indian Government has its own motives

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to leave MONUC. We are unable to know with certainty what these are, but the following arguments are heard often in Kinshasa:

-- India no longer needs to send peacekeepers abroad for financial reasons and will not continue to expose its armed forces to risks in places, like the DRC, of little strategic importance to India.

-- The Indians have a valid complaint that, having contributed so greatly to MONUC, the UN has refused to appoint an Indian general as force commander or SRSG. We note that one source has stated that an Indian has not been selected as force commander because there are no qualified general officers in the Indian army who speak French.

-- India's generous participation in PKO,s has been premised on an expectation that India will be rewarded with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Since this is not likely to happen soon, there is no reason to soldier on as MONUC's largest troop contributor.

-- Since the November 26 Mumbai bombings, and because of the conflict in Kashmir, India needs to station as many as of its troops as possible on its soil.

9. (C) Although we cannot attest to the validity of these arguments, we do know from SRSG Alan Doss (pls protect) that the Indian Government recently turned down a proposed visit on March 12 to New Delhi by Congolese Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwanka and SRSG Doss to deliver a letter from President Kabila asking the Indians to stay on. Thambwe and Doss were to be joined in New Delhi by U/SYG Le Roy and SYG Ban Ki-moon's chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar (himself an Indian). The Indian government told the DRC it needed time to study Kabila's letter, which they had already received via e-mail. India's unwillingness to receive the UN-Congolese delegation is telling: India, if it decides to reverse its decision, will remain in MONUC on its own terms. (Note: Just days prior to the projected March 12 visit, Thambwe gave an effusive speech praising the Indians at Indian contingent

headquarters in Goma during a dinner for Ban Ki-Moon during the Secretary General's trip to the DRC. The DRC Embassy in New Delhi distributed copies of the speech as a prelude to Thambwe's aborted visit, hoping to pave the way for a reconciliation with India and an announcement that the decision would be reversed. End note.)

10. (C) Comment: The Congolese clearly bear a large part of the responsibility for India's decision to withdraw from MONUC. But the argument that the Indians want to leave because they are not given the respect they are due is somewhat disingenuous: the Congolese are willing to make amends and the ball is now with the Indians. Regardless of how a save-facing rapprochement comes about to permit India to remain in MONUC, it is absolutely essential that this happen. Despite criticisms against India, Indian troops are the linchpin of MONUC and the DRC's future stability, not to mention the aspirations of its people for democratic government and economic prosperity, are at stake. End comment.

GARVELINK